Collaborative assessment planning: exploring rich assessment for the School Certificate

This article highlights the professional relationships between faculties and the teacher-librarian when they share a project focus as a professional learning team. **Jenny Byrne**, *Head teacher English, and* **Margaret Stapley**, *teacher-librarian, at Pendle Hill High School share their professional learning journey with* **Frances Plummer** *(Securing Their Future) as they document the development of the English faculty's assessment schedule for Year 10 at their school.*

The outcome of the project is an assessment schedule that maps information skills and the areas of assessment against each task. The focus of the assessment schedule is enhancing student learning by designing a range of tasks that gather the information the teacher needs to determine the level of each student's achievement.

Designing rich assessment tasks offers opportunities for faculties, teachers and teacher-librarians planning collaboratively to develop units of work to integrate learning, teaching and assessment for the School Certificate.

The first article of this series described the elements of rich assessment tasks as:
- explicitly describing the expectations of the task to the learner
- engaging the learner
- connecting naturally with what hasbeen taught
- providing opportunities for all students to make a start
- learning activities
- providing opportunities for all students to demonstrate subject knowledge, skills and understandings
- focussing on the critical areas of learning within a subject
- assisting teachers to determine the specific help which students may require

The potential for collaborative planning

Collaborative task design becomes exciting when it has the potential to broaden the existing assessment base to incorporate information literacy outcomes for all students as they actively engage in the assessment process. Students need opportunities to learn, practise and integrate the steps in the information skills process as they become competent in information retrieval and in using information technology. By integrating learning opportunities with assessment task design students can demonstrate achievement of syllabus and information literacy outcomes.

Assessment for the School Certificate describes what a student can do, knows and understands through authentic learning experiences. Collaborative planning can lead to designing assessment tasks that are relevant to real life situations. The information skills process provides a framework for task design for students to solve real information problems in all subject areas. In this framework the learners see a clear connection between the learning objectives, activities and method of assessment. Student learning outcomes become observable and measurable.

Planning an assessment project

Pendle Hill High School is an outer suburban, comprehensive secondary school with 720 students. It is a dynamic learning community where students are Encouraged to achieve their potential and teachers are supported by a whole school approach to training and development. The school's welfare program is an integral aspect of all school life.

Jenny Byrne (Head teacher English), members of the English faculty and **Margaret Stapley**, the teacher-librarian, formed a professional learning team with a project focus to develop an assessment schedule for Year 10.

Margaret commented that "the involvement in the development of this project created an opportunity to explore the possibilities in working with the English faculty to construct their assessment schedule for Year 10. As the tasks were constructed I, as teacher-librarian, could con-tribute in their planning to integrate information skills in each of the tasks."

Jenny reflected that "the collaborative processes throughout the project enabled the faculty to come to a shared understanding of their assessment practices. We were able to construct tasks that provided opportunities for all our Year 10 English students to demonstrate what they know and to achieve the course outcomes at varying levels of competence."

Rationale for the assessment schedule

The assessment schedule designed by the English faculty at Pendle Hill includes elements of rich task design as described in *Securing their future: subject based assessment for the School Certificate in English.* The six tasks developed in each of the program units are integral to the teaching and learning activities for the Year 10 program. The tasks in the assessment schedule address objectives of the English 7-10 syllabus. (See Table 1.)

Documented below is the project planning process Margaret and the English faculty implemented:
- School Management Conference on the nature of assessment (1998)
- review of assessment issues for the School Certificate for Year 10 (1999)
- development of the outline of the tasks and areas of assessment
- faculty design one task collaboratively

- further development of the individual tasks and assessment criteria
- faculty evaluation and refinement of the assessment tasks
- review of the completed assessment schedule
- distribution of assessment information to students and parents
- ongoing discussion, reflection and evaluation.

Outcomes of collaborative assessment planning for teachers

Hopkins & West (1998), as a result of six years of research through the *Improving the Quality of Education for All* (IQEA) project, proposed a number of classroom conditions as enabling factors for learning. In the context of this article, these conditions can describe the outcomes of the collaborative planning at Pendle Hill High School:

1. Promotes authentic relationships among teachers.

Hargreaves & Fullan (1998) describe any strategy that improves relationships has a chance of succeeding... and leads to improved problem solving and learning. In the context of professional learning, as a team seeking solutions to assessment design, the teachers agree this has been a valuable experience for them. Developing and supporting authentic relationships is central to the success of collaborative planning and critical to improved learning for students.

2. Supports access to planning, resources and preparation of a range of appropriate structured learning and teaching strategies and materials to meet a range of individual student learning needs.

"The result is teachers taking into account their own personalities, values and expertise when planning learning units. The teachers had the opportunity to choose to modify a previous task or create new tasks that interested them." (Jenny)

3. Expands teachers' repertoire to positively influence the quality of learning outcomes by integrating information skills, syllabus content and areas of assessment.

"By mapping the information skills developed in each assessment task I was able to identify where I can strengthen resources and work with the teachers to enhance student learning." (Margaret)

4. Enhances professional learning through developing pedagogic partnerships.

Russell (1989) and Stoll & Mortimore (1995) describe effective teacher development taking place in schools where there is a culture of collaboration; working with a colleague not only dispels feelings of isolation but also assists in enhancing practice. eg "At Pendle Hill, for this project, the teachers have formed a professional learning team (PLT) dedicated to the improvement of teaching, learning and assessing for the School Certificate. The teacher-librarian plays a critical role in the distributed leadership of the PLT. This creates opportunities to work with other faculties as they develop further their assessment policies and practices." (Margaret)

5. Opportunity for reflection on teaching in classrooms where assessing what students can do, know and understand is based on evidence collected through assessment tasks and classroom activities.

Teachers in the English faculty have used this professional team learning opportunity to reflect on their current assessment policy and practices. The result is an assessment schedule that:
- develops authentic classroom earning experiences
- deliberately integrates assessment in the teaching and learning units
- communicates clear expectations for

student performance set by the teacher
- is relevant to students' ability, interests and experiences
- engages students in their learning.

Meeting the Challenge of assessment for the School Certificate

The assessment project was initiated at Pendle Hill High School by the English faculty in repsonse to the School Certificate Grading System. While this project defined the work of the faculty it also created professional development opportunities to transfer the learning to planned assessment for Years 7-9. The professional learning outcomes included a chance to discuss teaching and learning philosophies and visions in the context of the school as a dynamic learning community.

> The Department of Education and Training has implemented a statewide strategy for the establishment in schools of professional learning teams to support the implementation of the new Higher School Certificate. Professional learning teams are groups of teachers who work collegially, through projects that focus on more effective student learning. The professional learning team provides a structure through which: schools can frame problems and seek solutions; and each school can integrate and sequence its program of initiatives. Support for professional learning teams has been provided in the form of statewide funding, professional development activities in districts and the resource materials *Enhancing learning through the new HSC through professional learning teams: resource manual.*

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
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TABLE 1 PENDLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH FACULTY ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE FOR YEAR 10 1999

TASK	UNIT	TIMING	SYLLABUS OBJECTIVE (PENDLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL STAGE 5 ENGLISH PROGRAM OUTCOMES)	AREAS OF ASSESSMENT					INFORMATION SKILLS					
				Talking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Viewing	Define	Locate	Select	Organise	Present	Evaluate
1. Media	Media Madness	Term 1 Week 10	*Syllabus Objective: experiencing, enjoying and responding sensitively and perceptively to the mass media* Responding to a specific mass media item. Constructing mass media product in an altered context.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
2. Creative Writing	Out of Control (conflict and violence)	Term 2 Week 5	*Syllabus Objective: writing with pleasure, confidence and competence over a wide range of registers* Writing for a specific situation, audience and purpose in a specified form.			✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
3. Talking	Speak Up! Speak Out!	Term 2 Week 10	*Syllabus Objective: recognising, enjoying, broadening and exercising control over their oral language repertoire* Talking for a specific situation, audience and purpose in a chosen form (by student). Talking using appropriate conventions of speech.	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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TABLE 1 cont.
PENDLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH FACULTY ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE FOR YEAR 10 1999

INFORMATION SKILLS						TASK	UNIT	TIMING	SYLLABUS OBJECTIVE — PENDLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL STAGE 5 ENGLISH PROGRAM OUTCOMES	AREAS OF ASSESSMENT				
Define	Locate	Select	Organise	Present	Evaluate					Talking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Viewing
✓			✓	✓	✓	4. Response to humour	Always look on the bright side of life	Term 3 Week 5	*Syllabus Objective: experiencing, enjoying and responding sensitively and perceptively to a wide range of literature* — Analysing and responding to a variety of humorous texts (eg. TV., cartoon, narrative etc).		✓	✓	✓	✓
✓				✓	✓	5. Response to literature	Where are we going? (The future)	Term 3 Week 10	*Syllabus Objective: experiencing, enjoying and responding sensitively and perceptively to a wide range of literature* — Responding in writing sensitively, perceptively and competently to a piece of literature.			✓	✓	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6. Leisure portfolio	Chillin' out	Term 4 (ongoing)	*Syllabus Objective: addresses specific components of the five syllabus objectives* — Reading, writing and talking for a variety of purposes in a variety of forms.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

TABLE 2   PENDLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL - DESCRIPTION FOR YEAR 10, 1999

ASSESSMENT TASK	ASSESSMENT APPROACH/ES	MANAGEMENT	EVIDENCE COLLECTION METHOD
Media	• Whole product	• Class task • Integrated in teaching and learning unit • Assessment criteria	• Work sample • Product
Creative Writing	• Creating text	• Class Activity • Assessment criteria	• Work sample • Formal testing
Speaking	• Research activity • Performance • Engaging with text: speaking	• Peer group presentation • At conclusion of teaching and learning sequence • Assessment criteria	• Observation • Oral presentation
Response to humour	• Engaging with text: writing, reading, listening	• Class task • Teaching and learning informs the task • Assessment criteria	• Work sample
Response to literature	• Engaging with text: reading, writing	• Class task • Teaching and learning informs the task • Assessment criteria	• Work sample
Leisure Portfolio	• Research activity • Creating relevant text	• Task given at the beginning of the unit • Assessment criteria	• Observation • Portfolio